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# THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

## WALL PAPER DESIGNS.



ALL PAPER which supplies an enlarged, enriched and inexpensive means of decoration, assumes constantly as of yore, new phases in design, exemplified in novelties aiming to correspond to the tendencies of general taste in supplying wholly new effects. Fashion has to be formed or led in wall paper designs as in other decorative art industries. The demand for variety, if not not so riotous, is at least as intense as in the days of the Pompadours and DuBarrys, when the chorazi in the "Congress of Fashion" might have been appropriately chanted:

"Oh dear, what will become us?  
Oh dear, what shall we do?  
We shall die of blue devils if some of us  
Can't hit on something that's new."

Wall paper at the outset was decorated with painted pictorial designs suggested by tapestry hangings with arabesque or other fanciful borders. Famous artists of the easel contributed their talent, touching the wall paper with their pencils with the same delight that they would have sketched on canvas. The very spontaneity of their productions encouraged a freedom in the rendering that gave to these wall paper pictures in a superior degree the quality of lightness. Celebrated oil paintings, modern and antique, were reproduced in water colors. The paper was of great thickness, being literally a hanging, often coarse. They were often of high value,—indeed, *articles de luxe*,—and being hung in place admitted of being transported from one residence to another. Then came block printing followed by the cylindrical printing process by which the greater proportion of wall hangings are now turned out,—a process that has reached high excellence, though inferior in results to block printing. In the course of by-gone manufacture we witness certain features of design introduced that presently appear again in modified form after a lapse of time. The versatility of taste and its capriciousness are in nothing more apparent than the styles that have come and gone. Just now we verge on characteristics of the wall paper of the 17th and 18th centuries in the tendency of design to light and bright colors allied with dull primaries, abundant detail and free gradation of tints, damascened grounds, flower designs and flowing tracery. Generally taste inclines to more positive color effects.

Originality and beauty necessarily give a special value to wall paper designs, a prime condition being its fitness for the interior to which it is applied. This suitability of application is now better understood than ever. Few would put a large pattern into a small room, so lessening its apparent dimensions, or one with the brilliancy of color adapted to a dining room in an apartment mainly devoted to family gatherings. The vanished heresy that floral designs should be so conventionalized as scarcely to be recognizable, a view strengthened by poor imitations, has been properly discarded by manufacturers as shown in a host of beautiful patterns, graduated tints being used not only to beautify leaves and flowers, but to alter apparent position and secure effects not very dissimilar to those of shadow. Grounds, too, are so managed as to give to flowers, tendrils, and foliage, treated in pale or hazy tints, fine receding effects. Good artistic designs are free from excess of detail as to form and either undue brightness or sombreness, from horizontal lines in ornamental devices except such as mark structural dimensions, and the exact repetition of figures each of which in its entirety would fill the retina of the eye and the recurrence of which is thus rendered displeasing. The most satisfactory effect is when the eye is tempted to wander over the whole surface decoration, lured not only by beauty of harmony of color but by graceful curves connecting or interspersing the main figures whilst the geometrical system underlying the whole is not at first sight apparent. Small patterns are capacitated to aid the display of light tints and the introduction of a variety of bright colors so giving to the design the quality of vivacity, but such treatment is only suitable to a portion of wall space, and if below the frieze, the latter should be of a bold and simple character as to form. It was with minute detail in clear light tints that Moorish and Byzantine decorators secured the fine general color effects at which they aimed.

A greater variety of flowers is being utilized by wall paper designers. The capacity of a few well-known beautiful types to produce decoration is limitless. Art has been at times debased by the effort to obtain variety by new and unaccustomed forms not found in nature. The symmetrical combination of ugliness produces little pleasure. When the kaleidoscope was first brought out it was thought it would furnish endless suggestions of artistic beauty, but it has proved a mistake. Natural objects are properly rendered ornamental by subordinating detail to the designers ideal. The lower art descends, the less apparent are the promptings of the designer's mind in fashioning or combining the type according to his discretion in adapting it for its purpose. There is likeness

only in mediocrity. The more art mounts up the more marked is the distinction between one designer's work and that of another.

Among current wall paper patterns we find ampler provision for the growing taste for paneled surfaces, with rustic, arabesque or other fanciful surroundings, in some cases the panel itself showing a few scattered ornaments or a pictorial sketch in outline in center, dependence being placed for attractiveness on the contrasting color effect of the general ground with elaborated details framing in and surmounting the whole against deeper shades of the same ground. The airy-like space of the panels affords a field of rest to the eye after surveying accessories, the latter admitting of effective touches of primitive color peculiar in nature to minutive and finest details.

## PRESENTATION OF FURNITURE.

WHAT appears a commendable idea in the way of testimonials, and one which has certainly been lost sight of, was the old-time presentation to a Lord Mayor of London by his admirers, which took the shape of furnishing a dining room in his house. The furnishing was so complete as to extend to door knobs, and key and finger plates. The idea was original, bringing out strongly the elements of personality in establishing constantly renewed associations between the recipient and the donors, on occasions of social and convivial gatherings. We commend the example as likely to be fruitful, if followed, of the happiest artistic results. It is not to be supposed that a number of men would compromise themselves in such case by not assuring with good material and workmanship combined with suitableness, such harmonious effect in the entirety of the display against adverse æsthetic criticism, as would thus compliment themselves whilst honoring another in the taste displayed. The furnishing, too, would necessarily have to be an improvement on that which it displaced. Competent decorative guidance would be sought such as would exclude bizarre effects, often brought about by gradual accumulation of articles in rooms without particular reference to what they already contain, or for the gratification of diverse tastes on the part of different members of a household, or for the indulgence of fancies of a more or less capricious character.

How simple are the appliances of not a few of the decorative arts, the result mainly depending on the readiness with which the hand obeys the mind. Take the Florentine mosaicist. The beautiful tableaux in colored stones that he produces, some of these embedded in marble slabs, others bound together for insertion in stucco walls are supplied by him with an equipment consisting of thin slices of colored stones which he polishes with emery powder, a basin of water, a brazier, a vice, copper and iron blades used as files, wax and mastic to unite the stones with an almost invisible film, and an iron, heated in a charcoal fire, to render this lining binding. The supply of stones for mosaics being in itself a business, they are furnished at a remarkably low figure. According to the genius of the artist, productions are at times forthcoming of high intrinsic value and fitted to adorn the stateliest mansions. There is another style of mosaic, consisting of fragments of stones and glass cubes, in which mosaic mural work is usually carried out, and which is more permanent and effective. The time will certainly come when mosaic decorations will be more extensively adopted as features in extended moral designs. True decorative instinct is required to accord it its place in such design, but well planted and with suitable accessories the effect is charming. There is a subtle beauty, a softness and seeming depth in the commonest stones as in flints, blue and red granite, whilst marble and pebbles furnish a multiplicity of hues and tints; with these may be intermingled antique and green porphyry, oriental serpentine, jade basalt, silicious breccia, and even amethysts, agates, sardonyx and chalcedony.

EXCESSIVE projection and ornament should always be avoided in the frames of oil paintings. Flat surfaces in rich hardwood, with a few gold lines of moulding and some suggestive enrichments, will generally look well. Perhaps the greatest mistake made in picture-framing is in having the frame altogether gilded. Whilst a little gilding may enhance the effect of a picture, a plentiful use of gold leaf, especially when the painting is new, seriously injures all its delicate tones, and the niceties of cool coloring are lost. If a picture is painted for a particular position in an apartment it is desirable that the frame, while in harmony with the picture, should partake of the architectural character of the room, should this be sufficiently distinctive as regards any special style.